

110th International Labour Conference - Plenary Speech

Elmer Labog
Chairperson, Kilusang Mayo Uno
Philippine Workers Delegation Head

Greetings of peace and solidarity to all the delegates!

I wish to convey my warm congratulations to everyone for a successful 110th International Labour Conference.

I stand here today to represent the Filipino workers. And let me express our profound concern on the worsening labor rights situation in the Philippines.

During the 108th International Labour Conference in 2019, serious violations of ILO Convention No. 87 in the Philippines were reported to the Committee on the Application of Standards. This led the 2019 Conference Committee to request the Philippine Government to receive a high-level tripartite mission. But it was only this year that the Philippines formally accepted the Mission with the original schedule set in May 2022. However, it was postponed anew.

We are extremely disappointed over this postponement. And while we await urgent action, grave trade union rights violations remain unchecked.

The situation has actually worsened since 2019. Additional cases were reported to the ILO Tripartite Virtual Exchange in September 2021. Most notable include the killing of trade unionists Manny Asuncion, Dandy Miguel, Dennis Sequeña, and Leonardo Escala. Killings, illegal arrests, trumped-up charges, harassment, red-tagging, and forced disaffiliation have intensified despite our repeated demands to investigate and address these.

Meanwhile, we are still confronted with inhumane wages, inadequate benefits, and precarious forms of work. Informal workers are the hardest hit by crises yet only benefitted from limited social protection programs. Women workers became more vulnerable to abuse, discrimination and violence. Filipino migrant workers are in protest over mandatory imposition of various hefty taxes on their hard-earned incomes, only to see these pocketed by corrupt officials. Our maritime professionals, composing over 25% of the world's maritime workforce, are stranded in various countries due to unscrupulous practices of illegal recruiters.

Yet the government took initiatives which are now being used to further restrict trade union movement, such as: the establishment of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, the creation of the Alliance for Industrial Peace and Program Office, the adoption of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, and continuing abuse in the use of judicial search warrants. The narrative of counter-insurgency is being used to criminalize trade union work.

With this, President Duterte will be leaving office with a legacy of unparalleled trade union rights violations. Without accountability, these transgressions will remain unabated. Now, the challenge lies with the incoming administration of Bongbong Marcos. Having not presented any concrete platform on how to address workers' issues, the work is surely cut out for him.

With this backdrop, we demand Marcos II to: 1) express its commitment to accept the ILO high-level mission soonest possible time, 2) develop roadmap for resolving the concerns raised in the Virtual Exchange together with the workers sector; 3) express its commitment to uphold and protect workers' rights by meaningfully complying with ILO Conventions; 4) hold President Duterte and perpetrators of injustice accountable; and 5) present a clear-cut program to address grave issues on decent work and social protection.

For us, there is no greater cause than the struggle for the rights of workers. Our commitment to this struggle continues. We urge your continued solidarity with the Filipino workers.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY